

“Facing Goliath”

I Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23) 32-49

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How many of you remember the movie, *The Karate Kid*? If you remember this movie from the early 1980’s you will remember a phrase the wise old man, Mr. Miyagi teaches his young pupil, Daniel. “Wax on, wax off.” Daniel is being bullied by kids in his high school. He meets an old man, Mr. Miyagi, who has a black belt in Karate, who agrees to help him with this “bullying” problem.

On his first day, Mr. Miyagi sends Daniel out to wax and polish several of his old cars. Remember his instructions...wax on, wax off. All day long Daniel labors to follow these instructions...wax on, wax off. On the second day the old man asks Daniel to paint his fence—paint up, paint down. Again, this takes all-day and still no karate lesson. On the third day, Mr. Miyagi tells Daniel to sand the wooden floor of his verandah—insisting he follow a meticulous, circular motion, and again it takes all day. At the end of the third day the boy is angry and frustrated. “I’ve done all this work for you,” he protests, “and you still have taught me nothing!”

At this point, Mr. Miyagi tells Daniel to stand in front of him and do the motion of wax on, wax off. As the master goes to hit him, his blows are deflected by the boy’s movements. Daniel’s work with Mr. Miyagi—his obedience—has made him ready for his first lesson in how to face danger, it has prepared him for the lessons, and any dangers to follow.

In the course of our lives, many things may cause us to fear. There are giants who are hostile to us and all that we hold dear. For each of us the dangers may be different. The things we fear and the intensity of that fear varies from person to person.

When I was growing up my family lived about thirty miles from Boston and I never recall driving into Boston with my mother. She was fine around town but driving in the big city was too frightening. As much as I am comfortable speaking in front of people, my twin brother would not be caught dead doing what I do. Likewise, you have yet to see me run a marathon as he does. We fear many things. We avoid the things we fear and can not control. We turn them into something gigantic and

overwhelming when they are typically neither. For some, the fear of getting cancer consumes them, for others they fear being alone, or losing a job, or meeting a predator in an Internet chat room. We face many dangers today, perhaps more than any other generation, and it is not unreasonable to fear these dangers. Fear is a natural response. It is when we fail to pay attention to that still small voice within warning us that something is not right that we so often get ourselves into trouble.

While a healthy level of fear can prevent us from undo harm, fearing everything or allowing that voice to become a deafening roar can lead to paralysis. When we allow fear to dictate our every decision it robs us of our desire and ability to experience the very things that may bring us joy. Fear has the potential to overshadow the one thing that is essential for living—the Holy Spirit that dwells richly within us all. When we live in constant fear we become trapped, imprisoned, and locked away from the one who would lead us beyond our fear to something truly amazing.

In the story of David and Goliath we heard read this morning, we find our ancestors paralyzed by fear. They are trapped by their fear of mighty Goliath, the Philistines' secret weapon. No one is courageous enough to confront Goliath. Without finding a way to defeat him, they remain terrorized by the very thought of him. When they assess power and advantage from a human perspective, Saul and his army seem utterly defeated. However, like the tiny mustard seed that grows into a mighty tree, the solution to their problem and the way out of their paralysis comes from the least likely place.

Have you met Goliath? Goliath is not some mythical character we learn about in the bible. Goliath is that great big giant of an obstacle that seems unbeatable, insurmountable, or impossible. It is that one huge problem that you think just might be your undoing—a difficulty so great that it has you entertaining thoughts of throwing in the towel. The truth is, we have all faced some manifestation of Goliath, and we have either been paralyzed by it or we have, like David, discerned a way to defeat it.

David teaches us many lessons about how to confront Goliath. He is the least likely candidate to face this opponent and yet he unhesitatingly steps forward and offers to slay this mighty beast. It appears as though Saul's army was not strong enough, or equipped enough or courageous enough to do it. Saul would shrink from the very mention of Goliath, giving him far

more power over him than he deserved. Goliath was imposing, to be sure, however, somehow David understood what it would take to defeat Goliath. What strikes me about the David we meet in this story is his level of self knowledge and his complete trust in God. David knew himself and his gifts. He did not try to put on someone else's personality or ways. He not only knows himself, he also trusts God and God's power.

David was a simple shepherd. He had never served in an army and certainly had no experience slaying giants. What David had was a profound faith. He did not put his trust in his own strength, cunning, or abilities, but trusted that God would work through him to get the job done. God had done it before and would do it again. This David believed. His faith set him apart from everyone else.

Into this difficult situation of conflict and stalemate, David brings a radically different understanding of power. David was connected to a power much greater than himself. He understood that the power to save was not based on sophisticated weaponry, but on the power of God. David trusted in God to bring justice. David did not need the king's armor or weapons of war to defeat Goliath. In fact, the king offers David his armor and David takes it off, using only the tools of a shepherd to defeat the enemy.

Victory is only possible when David accesses his own gifts and uses the tools that God has given him. He can not assume the role of someone else. He does not pretend to be Saul. Saul's armor does not suit him. David trusted that God would protect him and provide whatever he needed. In his bag, he carried a slingshot and five stones. They may symbolize all that any of us needs to slay Goliath.

One stone represents *courage*. David was courageous beyond his years or his stature because he trusted in God. The second stone represents *confidence*. As a shepherd David had fought off wild animals many times to protect his flock. He was sure that he could win this battle as well. The third stone represents *preparation*. David did not face the giant unprepared. He went down to the river, selected five smooth stones, and placed them in his shepherd bag along with his slingshot. He knew that this was all he would need. When he released his stone, God would do the rest. The fourth stone represents *trust*. David did not trust in his own ability to slay the giant. When Goliath shouted at David, cursing him, ready to kill him, David said, "you come to me with a sword and spear, but I come to you in the

name of the LORD God Almighty.” (I Samuel 17:45) It was David’s profound trust in God that ensured his victory. Finally, the fifth stone represents *victory*. “It is God’s battle, not ours,” David said. That is why he was able to slay the giant with only a slingshot and a stone. He understood, as we so often do not, that the power comes not from us, but from God working through us.

I invite you to fill your bag with these five stones. They are all you will need to slay the giants in your life. You and I may never face a giant like Goliath, but we face giants of another kind every day. We face giants such as fear, insecurity, loneliness, and failure. When we feel defeated by these spiritual giants we know God has given us what we need: courage, confidence, preparation, trust and the assurance that whenever we turn the battle over to God, we will be victorious.

The Karate Kid needed more than a quick fix to overcome the “giant” he faced. Mr. Miyagi understood that what Daniel really needed was the instinctive, basic skills to face any trouble in his life. He trusted that real victory would come when Daniel could intuitively face any challenge and trust that he possessed the skills and courage to overcome. Wax on, wax off. God teaches us the same lessons. We have what it takes to defeat the giants in our lives. We will not succeed by stepping into another person’s shoes or accepting another person’s expectations for us. We will only succeed when we understand that God has already given us whatever it is we need to defeat the enemy; in five simple stones and a slingshot. May it be so! Amen